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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 013026

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2019  
TAGS: AF, CH, MARR, PGOV, PREL  
SUBJECT: APPROACHING CHINA ON THE NORTHERN DISTRIBUTION  
NETWORK

Classified By: EAP PDAS GLYN T. DAVIES FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (U) This is an action request. Embassy Beijing please  
see paragraph 4.

2. (S) Background and Objectives: Commander, U.S.  
Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) and Commander, U.S. Central  
Command (CENTCOM), in coordination with the Commander, U.S.  
Pacific Command (PACOM) and with the concurrence of the State  
Department, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Joint  
Staff, seek to incorporate a transportation route through the

People's Republic of China (PRC) in support of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) that transports supplies to U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan. A China route would support the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan by broadening and further diversifying the logistics options available.

3. (S) Adding a China route to the NDN would have strategic, operational, and tactical benefits. Specifically, a China commercial transit option would make China a greater stakeholder in international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, would provide an efficient and effective alternative to increasingly unstable Pakistani land routes, and could potentially cost less than the European/Central Asian NDN route.

3. (S) The China route would rely on commercial shippers and existing commercial transportation and infrastructure. Subsequent transit could be routed through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, and thence to Afghanistan. The Department of Defense has weighed the costs and benefits of a China route and decided to pursue this approach with appropriate steps taken to mitigate risks. In 2006, China expressed interest in cooperating with the U.S. for delivery of non-lethal aid to Afghanistan.

4. (U) Action Request: Embassy Beijing is requested to approach appropriate interlocutors in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the highest appropriate level to inform them of our desire to establish a route through China as part of the NDN and report response by February 24. Talking points may be left as a non-paper. We welcome the involvement of the Defense Attach's Office (DAO) in this effort, but to emphasize the commercial nature of this route, we recommend against any DAO presence at this meeting.

5. (S) Begin talking points/non-paper:

-- The U.S. military will be deploying additional forces over the coming months to support stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. U.S. transportation and logistics support to these efforts would benefit from additional routes into Afghanistan from the North.

-- The U.S. military currently ships a wide range of non-lethal supplies through Pakistan and via the Middle East, and is beginning to transport supplies via Europe, Russia and Central Asia.

-- We have worked bilaterally with transit countries to

obtain approval for the shipment of non-lethal goods by commercial carriers. Approval has taken different forms: Sometimes it has been a verbal approval from a Minister or sometimes via an exchange of diplomatic notes.

-- We seek your support in our efforts to explore the possibility of transporting non-lethal supplies through China using commercial shippers and existing civilian transportation networks. Subsequent surface transportation could be routed through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, from whom the United States already has obtained permission for such shipments.

-- The supplies we would be shipping through China include, but are not limited to, such items as food, tents, blankets, lumber, shampoo, etc. We would not ship sensitive or lethal cargo through China.

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-- Any freight forwarder contracted by the U.S. government would arrange transportation within China. These shipments would be handled by employees of the commercial carriers contracted by the U.S. government.

-- As with other commercial cargo, we understand that all such shipments would be subject to Chinese shipping and customs regulations as well as relevant domestic laws.

-- We appreciate China's contributions to international reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and hope China will further participate in measures to stabilize the country by facilitating the flow of much-needed supplies across its territory. A secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan will reduce instability across Central Asia and is in both our countries' interest.

End talking points/nonpaper.

6. (S/REL CHINA) Below are additional points to use on an "if asked" basis:

-- Q: Has Kazakhstan agreed to the transit of these goods from China? A: Government of Kazakhstan officials gave their approval for transit both verbally and in a diplomatic note.

-- Q: What type of permission did Russia grant? A: The U.S. military will ship supplies through Russia using a NATO transit agreement.

-- Q: Could you share a sample agreement with one of the NDN countries? A: We would be happy to provide you with a draft exchange of diplomatic notes.

-- Q: How do you define "non-lethal supplies"? A: If requested, we will provide you with a list of prohibited items that we will not ship per NATO's transit agreement with Russia.

-- Q: Will there be any U.S. military personnel accompanying these shipments? A: No, there will be no U.S. military personnel accompanying these shipments through China. Shipments will be handled by commercial transportation companies, acting on behalf of the Department of Defense (DOD).

-- Q: Will DoD be publicizing this route the way NDN has been publicized? A: DoD has not sought to publicize NDN routes, but as this is an unclassified, commercial venture, it could become public knowledge over time.

-- Q: Will you be using American or Chinese shippers? A: The U.S. government contracts with large commercial carriers such as Hapag Lloyd, APL, and Maersk. These carriers subcontract or partner with smaller companies in a country or region to deliver cargo.

-- Q: Is this in response to the Manas Airbase situation? A: No, the NDN was established to expand the flow of supplies into Afghanistan from the North.

-- Q: How will goods transit China? At this time, TRANSCOM plans to ship goods primarily via rail.

7. (U) Please contact EAP/CM's Justin Higgins with any questions or follow-up issues on this subject (202-647-6959 - [higginsjx@state.sgov.gov](mailto:higginsjx@state.sgov.gov)) and slug any reporting on this issue for EAP/CM, OSD, JCS, and US TRANSCOM).  
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